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GOLD TREASURES FROM PERU
RECALL ANCIENT CULTURES

Recent Pre-Columbian discoveries, most of them never before shown in the United States, will open February 23 in Gallery E of The Cleveland Museum of Art. The exhibit, TREASURES OF PERUVIAN GOLD, sponsored by the Embassy of Peru, comes to Cleveland under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. The pieces will remain at the Museum through April 3.

More than 150 ceremonial and ornamental masterpieces of the goldsmith's art have been assembled from seven public and private Peruvian collections, each representing one of five ancient Peruvian cultures, beginning with the second century and ending with the sixteenth century Spanish conquest. These golden objects are examples of the amazing Peruvian riches which lured the first Conquistadores to South America; they are rare and their origin and age is obscured, since they are the sole survivors of the ravages of looters and those who melted the objects down into ingots for shipment to Spain.

The Peruvians themselves, however, were interested in their gold, not commercially, but as a religious symbol or as a mark of power and nobility. From it they made objects of personal adornment (nose and ear ornaments, belts, pendants, etc.), cult figures and ceremonial and secular, functional objects (masks, knives, etc.).

The exhibition traces the development of these pieces of gold through five cultures: 1) the Vicús, a local, early culture, flourishing about 200 A.D. and one of the first to mix gold with an alloy (copper) -- up to this time the techniques had been hammering and repoussé only; feline or other animal designs were common. 2) the Mochica (about 300-700 A.D.), a more widespread and advanced culture which melted its gold with copper and precious metals and cast it by the "lost wax" method; the

Mochica designs are characteristically realistic and sensitive. 3) the Nasca, a local culture (at its height about 900 A.D.), typified by extreme stylization and lack of modeling; the goldsmithing techniques were not advanced and few Nasca objects survive. 4) the great urban Chimú culture (about 1200-1438 A.D.), considered the most important in advanced gold technology; here the methods of soldering, veneering, gilding, electrum and other alloys, embossing, the "lost wax" process, beading, filigree work, etc. all reached perfection and a certain mechanization in reproduction. 5) the Inca empire, which was the culmination of the output of these other cultures; the Incas united the ability and knowledge of artisans of all four regions of Peru, but after the onslaught of the colonists in the 1500's, few of the objects they produced were left.

An illustrated catalog accompanies the show.

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